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CONTRIBUTORS DEPARTMENT.

Be Careful, Make no Mistakes.

EDITOR ADVOCATE:—The order of the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union is making accretions at an almost unparalleled rate, but it must be careful as to its modes of procedure or disintegration will begin at one end before the work of organization is completed at the other, and it will fall to the ground to become a reproach to its friends and a by-word to scoffers.

Bear with me, if you please, while I call attention to the principal abuse which led to this movement and then to the errors we may fall into in attempting to combat this abuse:

We must not forget that the chief troubles, I do not say the sole troubles, but chief troubles with which we have been accursed have been the inadequacy of the wages and prices we have been forced to accept and the extortionate prices we have been forced to pay in our dealings with a class who have secured the advantage. And we must not forget that this price inequality has only been wrought through combinations—that the railroads and telegraph companies and banking corporations and manufacturing, mining and jobbing establishments have been enabled to overcharge and underpay us until they have entered into a solid compact, one with the other, so to do—that the murder of competition has necessarily preceded extortion.

Neither must we forget that had it not been for combinations and the suppression of competition we would have bought and sold at natural prices,—that is, the prices the law of competition dictates,—and would not now be in debt, but on the contrary would be free of debt and surrounded with all the comforts an industrious and ingenious people abiding in a bountiful and productive region had a right to expect.

We will then be prepared to perceive that our leading efforts should be directed necessarily toward the abolition of the combinations and the prevention of their formation in the future, and that it is a mistake to allow ourselves to be switched off into issues that have not this direct object in view.

Now, wherein are we liable to go wrong?

The farmers will make a mistake if they attempt to form combinations among themselves, in imitation of the present monopolists, for the purpose of limiting the supply or controlling the prices of their products. Why? Because, in the first place, they are not in a position to succeed, and in the second place, if they did succeed what would become of the mechanics, laborers and others who could

not combine? Somebody must be the victim of the combinations. No sir; let us come out and say: "Natural laws are good enough for us. Competition will do. The provision which God has created cannot be improved upon; neither can it be violated without injury to ourselves, and serious injury at that; consequently we will suppress that instrument of artificialism and oppression, the combine, and restore to its full function and force the natural law of competition." Then let us act in accordance therewith and we will not be making a mistake.

Let us go further. The farmers will make a mistake if they attempt to set themselves up in opposition to the merchants of their towns. These are the reasons. First, the retail dealers have not entered into combinations for the purpose of taking advantage of the farmers. On the contrary they have kept aloof from combinations and are as much the victims of existing combinations as are the farmers and would be as much benefitted by the suppression of the combinations as would be the farmers. This is proven by the fact that 90 per cent of the retailers fail at some time during the period of their lives. We must go back of the retail merchants to find those who have been guilty of entering into the trusts and combinations, back to the railroad managers, mining corporations, elevator ringsters, beef packers, manufacturers and jobbers. They are the guilty parties and their extortions have been as disastrous to the retail merchant as it has been to the farmer. No, it is further back than the retail merchant of the neighboring towns that we must go to find the actual enemy.

The second reason why the farmers will make a mistake in antagonizing the merchants of their towns is that the friends of this movement cannot afford to estrange a body of men who, if enlisted with them, would prove to be a most important adjunct to the cause. We have a hard fight to make, a powerful enemy to confront, and we need the companionship, the influence and the votes of the merchants and honest business men of our towns. We need their assistance and the assistance of all others who are not allied with the monopolists and consistently work with us.

Another reason why the farmer should not attempt to crowd out the home merchant is that no good reason can be assigned why the present set of merchants should be crowded to the wall in favor of another set of men who would soon occupy the same relationship to the farmers that the present merchants do. That such would be the case cannot be denied, for as a rule men prefer to confine their operations to some one vocation of their

choice and those who undertook it would soon tire of mixing farming with merchandising.

And now for mistakes that may be made in another direction.

Those make a mistake who imagine that currency reform legislation is all that is needed to relieve us of the mountain of evils with which we are environed. We need currency reform, that is true. We need more currency, sufficient for the business wants of the country. And it should be supplied to the people without the intervention of any preferred class who may reap a profit in getting it into circulation. But when we have secured currency reform what have we done? We have struck a blow at only a fraction of the evils of which we complain. We have done nothing to prevent Armour & Co. from manipulating the meat markets, or to prevent the railroad companies from charging all the traffic will bear or to prevent the numerous and mighty trusts and monopolies of the country from soon robbing the people of every advantage they had gained through currency legislation, thereby leaving them in as bad a condition as ever. We have done nothing of the kind, hence I say those make a mistake who imagine (and there are a number who do) that currency reform legislation is all the legislation we need at the present time.

Another mistake that the alliance, as an organization, may make is to commit itself to the favor of penal legislation against the monopolies and trusts. Penal legislation is no good. It is the old way, I know, but because it is an old way of dealing with extortioners and has never been a success where tried, it ought, as a reform reason, to be abandoned. It is the plan popular, too, with some of our senators and representatives, but so are a great many other plans that are advanced rather to satisfy the popular clamor than to hurt the enemy. We should try something that will bring results, something that has been proven to be a success where it has been tried and is fitted from its nature to be a success again. Such a plan is the taxing plan. It would work. Given the taxes to be so arranged as to discriminate against the combinations and we would witness the abolition of all the monopolies, be they landed, railroad, mining, beef packing, manufacturing or what they may be, in the commonwealth in which the tax was imposed. The alliance would make no mistake in committing itself to the tax plan. When it became law the people could rest easy. The monopolies would have to go. As this plan is suited to become a state rather than a national measure it would be wisdom on the part of the alliance in Kansas to take it up.

I have now called attention to some of the errors that the people of the alliances are liable to fall into in their endeavors to provide for the betterment of their condition. But I do not do so in a spirit of criticism. Far from it. There is not an individual in the order more desirous than I am to see the people relieved from their present enthrallment. Besides, I have felt the sting of existing conditions and have children coming to man and womanhood and I welcome that which sheds a promise to me and mine in the future. What I would do is to add something that will serve, not to be a form of reproach, but to put earnest men upon their guard. I would do what I can to persuade them to keep their batteries pointed incessantly and unflinchingly toward the real enemy and not to jeopardize their chances of success by being led off to war with friends or to manoeuvre against phantoms. I would further persuade them to believe and to act upon the principle that the best law of all laws is the natural law, that the greatest evil of all evils is that which consists of an obstruction to the natural law and that the only reform fitted to confer any real and lasting benefit is that which looks to the removal of whatever obstruction there may be to the free play of the natural law. Believing and acting upon this principle, they will make no mistake.

W. V. MARSHALL.

IS MR. MILLS INFALLIBLE?

[Written for The Advocate.]

It has pleased the Kansas City Times to say that "The article of Mr. Mills on the tariff in the North American Review is the ablest contribution to tariff literature that has appeared for some time. As an answer to Mr. Blaine it is conclusive, and as an exposition of the necessity of tariff reform it is unanswerable. Mr. Mills has fairly earned the right to a place in the front rank of democratic statesmen."

In the face of such a reputation as that enjoyed by Mr. Mills, it may be presumptuous and foolhardy for a "mere nobody" to attempt to question the logic or traverse the conclusions, employed and arrived at, by Mr. Mills in the article in question. Yet, at the risk of being laughed at for my pains, I shall venture to endeavor to show that his logic is lame and contradictory and his conclusions unwarranted by the facts in the case.

In the outset, one not in possession of that wisdom which belongs to statesmanship, may reasonably inquire if, as Mr. Mills says "We can hold our own market against the world" what benefits can possibly accrue to foreign Nations, by agreement of their free admission to a market which, as he has not possibly, railroads, la-